

Volunteers needed! ARUBA DOET, BON DOET AND CURA DOET promises to be a huge success once again!



Lately many social and goodwill organizations such as care homes, playgrounds, youth centers, community centers etc. has been registering jobs which need to be done on the websites of ARUBA DOET, BON DOET and CURA DOET who together with NL doet form the biggest volunteer initiative of the Dutch Kingdom.

The Oranje Fonds supports each project financially. Now it's the volunteers' turn to register.

"So if you are someone who would like to roll up their sleeves and help others, volunteer for (part of) a day at a foundation, association or care home, you are the person we are looking for," said a spokesperson of ARUBA DOET.

On March 21st and 22nd everyone can help these organizations get the job done and have a great time doing

it!

These activities could for example be painting a community centre, cleaning or planting a garden at a care home, organizing an outing for the physically disabled or participating in a beach clean-up all projects that one way or the other never get done.

Experience has shown that it is not only the work which is appreciated but the days are also very pleasant and fun.

Up until January 31st social organisations registered lots of work and are looking for extra hands to help on March 21st and 22nd.

Aruba has a total of 133 registered jobs, Bonaire 70 and Curacao 133.

The special websites of www.arubadoet.com, www.bonidoet.com and www.curadoet.com are open for volunteers to register for a specific job. This can be done



individually or as a company or organization, a school, sports club, group of friends... In other words: Everyone is welcome and everyone can register!

Visit the www.arubadoet.com website to register as a volunteer.

Parade, protests mark Chavez death anniversary

CARACAS (AFP) - Venezuela marked the first anniversary of Hugo Chavez's death on Wednesday with a parade of tanks, fighter jets and soldiers, as persistent protests dogged the late leader's handpicked successor.

Standing in an open-top limousine, President Nicolas Maduro and his wife Cilia Flores pumped their fists at thousands of supporters as they rolled along the Avenue of Heroes in Caracas before the military show of strength.

The crowd sang the national anthem in chorus with a recording of Chavez's booming voice, some choking back tears for the former colonel they remember as their "eternal comandante."

Anti-government students and the opposition -- angry over runaway crime, food shortages and soaring inflation -- sought to rain on the parade, but their protest in Caracas was smaller than the thousands who marched Tuesday and in previous days.

Some 300 people rallied in the capital's wealthier east side, where radical protesters built barricades with tree stumps, trash and furniture to disrupt traffic in several streets.

At least 18 people have died since early February during anti-government protests that Maduro has denounced as a US-backed plot by "fascists" to overthrow him.

"The violent groups threatened to shut down the country. The country is working freely, with calm," Maduro said, announcing an unspecified number of arrests of suspects he accused of trying to commit sabotage on bridges and highways.

The protests have posed the biggest challenge yet to Maduro's young presidency, though analysts say his government remains sturdy enough to withstand the pressure.

"The protests are a whim by the opposition to make the government fall, but they won't succeed," said Dubraska Graterol, a 24-year-old government worker at the parade.

Foreign dignitaries, including Cuba's President Raul Castro and his fellow leftist Bolivian counterpart Evo Morales, were on hand for the ceremony.

Earlier, Castro laid a white rose on Chavez's marble tomb in the Mountain Barracks which sit atop the hillside January 23 slum, renowned as a stronghold of government support. A ceremony was due to take place there later.

One of Chavez's Hollywood fans, US film-maker Oliver Stone, will premiere his documentary "My Friend Hugo" on national television.

Dutch Queen Maxima visits Colombia



COLOMBIA, Bogotá : Dutch Queen Maxima (L) and Colombia's first lady Maria Clemencia Rodriguez wave during a visit to a child care center in Ciudad Bolivar shantytown in Bogota, Colombia, on March 5, 2014. Queen Maxima is visiting Colombia as the United Nations Secretary-General's Special Advocate for Inclusive Finance for Development (UNSGSA). AFP PHOTO

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Mark Lyttleton-Frances of Radisson Aruba Resort, Casino & Spa named 2013 Radisson General Manager of the Year



are incorporated. A certified personal trainer, Mark also leads adventures, fitness excursions, and other guest activities throughout the property and the island. He also created the General Manager's Challenge, an event that inspired his employees to a five kilometer run for charity, and to lose over 1,000 pounds collectively.

The tropical oasis of the AAA Four Diamond Radisson Aruba Resort, Casino & Spa beckons from the sandy white expanse of Aruba's famed Palm Beach. The award-winning 15-acre resort, recently upgraded via a \$30 million renovation, is located 15 minutes from Queen Beatrix International Airport and a short walk from Aruba's shopping and dining center. With distinctive architecture, design, and sprawling prime grounds in a centralized location, the resort draws repeat leisure travelers and families, many of whom have gotten to know the staff personally.

To visit Radisson Aruba Resort, Casino & Spa, and to meet Mark, please visit www.radisson.com/palm-beach-hotel-aw/aruba for reservations and additional information.

PALM BEACH, ARUBA — Radisson Aruba Resort, Casino & Spa is proud to announce General Manager Mark Lyttleton-Frances was named the 2013 Radisson General Manager of the Year at Carlson Rezidor Hotel Group 2014 Radisson & Radisson Blu® Americas Business Conference held recently at the Radisson Blu Mall of America in Bloomington, MN.

"I am honored and humbled by this award," says Mark Lyttleton-Frances, general manager at Radisson Aruba Resort, Casino & Spa. "It means a great deal when you are recognized by your peers, and continues to inspire me to position Radisson Aruba as one of the leading health and wellness resorts in the Caribbean. This has been an incredible first year and I look forward to many more."

Under Mark's direction, Radisson Aruba also received the 2013 President's Award, the highest honor of recognition within Carlson Rezidor

Hotel Group. The award recognizes the resort's incredible staff for their excellent commitment to guest engagement, extraordinary efforts in finding new strategies to achieve revenue and profit goals, and their overall performance, which reflects their passion and dedication to the resort.

A native of South Africa, Mark has overseen luxury properties around the world for more than 20 years. He made a conscious decision to join the Radisson Aruba team in large part due to the company's support in creating lifestyle-oriented programming that truly offers today's traveler the most important option — choice. He is actively steering Radisson Aruba away from the traditional image of a Caribbean resort getaway by strategically introducing four elements — Rest & Relaxation, Nutrition & Diet, Rejuvenation, and Exercise & Fitness — under which all programming, activities and concepts

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Tourism is essential for improvement of our public finances says Minister of Tourism



ORANJESTAD -- The Minister of Tourism and Transport, Otmar Oduber, recently presented his management plan for 2013-2017 to all heads of government departments. This encounter was very important for the execution of the plan and primarily for his tourism portfolio.

The Minister took a brief look back at the past 4 years and what was accomplished. They spent 4 years consolidating our tourism and ensuring that there is growth in

tourism to generate a favorable income after the economic recession which hit the USA, our principal market. They also stabilized the airlines visiting Aruba to make sure that our hotels could reach the standards necessary to offer the best of service to our visitors. During the next four years they will focus on the product being offered in Aruba.

The government has set a very ambitious goal for the next 4 years. They foresee an average growth of 2.5% with respect to the number of tourists to visit. This number is relatively low in terms of what is normally set as a goal.

The reason for this is because they want to balance this with a 4% increase in tourism income into our economy. As a land mark they want to use the RevPar with a growth of 9%. This will contribute to the government's coffers and to necessary funds for the other ministries to be able to execute their management plans

and projects.

Tourism is the ministry that should provide the funds needed to fill the coffers of the Ministry of Finance that in turn would distribute these funds to the other ministries so they can make their planned investments, according to Minister Oduber.

The primary objective must remain, the Aruba Product, which entails the service we offer to our visitors which in turn will result in them spending more on Aruba.

The departments must work together regarding the service that must be given by the immigration, customs, the security by the Police Force, education in our schools, public health and the Hospital... they must all provide the very best to our visitors!

According to the Minister of Tourism, in 2014 Aruba will surpass the one million visitors to come to Aruba. This is in addition to an average of 700 thousand who come to the island by way of cruise ships. So, we are talking about 1.7 million visitors for the year to whom we will offer our services.

Oduber indicated that every department and Ministry form an integral part to help us reach the goal of our visitors spending more in our local economy.

Tourism remains our most important source of income, hence the reason for working together to accomplish the goals set before us for the next four years!

Minister working on a solution to reduce AO in the public sector

ORANJESTAD -- According to Minister of Finance and Government Organization, Juan David Yrausquin the AO (work absenteeism) in the public sector is almost 9%, which is 3 times higher than the average in the private sector and that this is unacceptable. The Minister is of the opinion that Ministers and heads of departments must take careful note of this and determine to put a stop to this phenomenon. It is a reflection of something that is wrong and it must be changed. It is also a sign of serious problems in the organization. According to Yrausquin, the head of the department has a great influence in the matter, what in-

centives are there to give those who come to work on time and have zero AO. At the same time, what sanctions are there for those who put the rules aside and ignore them? The consequence of a high AO is a high overtime. It also means that others have to work harder and this becomes a vicious circle.


Minister Yrausquin presented some figures of the AO situation of the departments giving a good example in the government's apparatus. Three departments with the lowest level of AO in the government are the: Meteorology Department with an AO of 1.9%, M.O.T. with a level of 2.2% and L.A.R. with 2.7%.

Continued on pg 5



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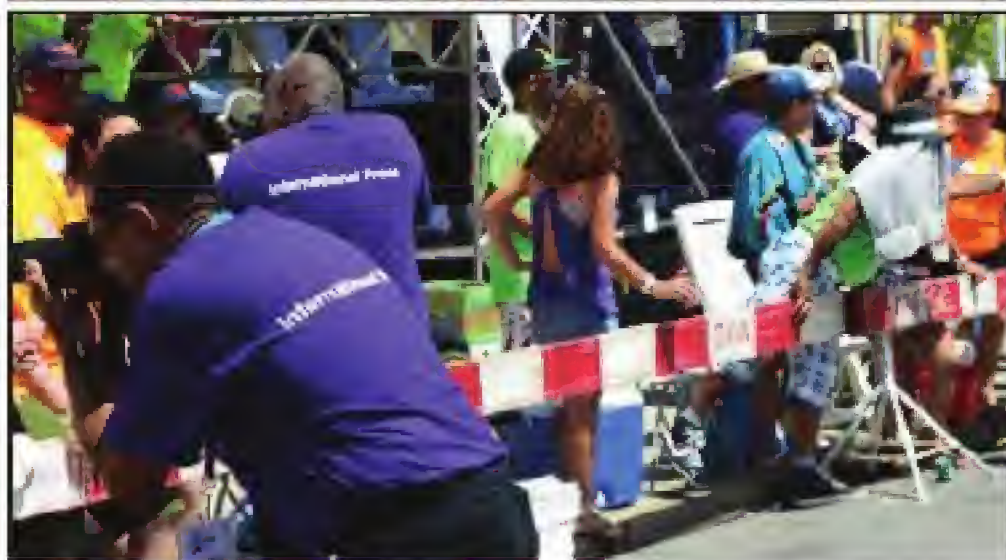


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International Press impressed with Aruba's Carnival!



This year the Aruba Tourism Authority, in addition to ensuring that international press covers our Carnival events, they also made an important financial contribution to SAC. Along with other patrons they arranged for a beautiful road piece for the

opening of the grand Carnival parade. In this manner our tourism office confirmed their commitment to our Carnival.

The ATA Office secured ample space next to the Talk of the Town and in front of the ATA building for our international press group. There they could set up their equipment easily to take pictures and record and converse with the participants and the public. For example, from Holland, a popular television program came to cover the Carnival parade to show how Aruba celebrates Carnival.

The ATA invited different members of the international press to come to Aruba for the final weekend of Carnival. For the occasion they prepared an excellent program which began on Thursday and ran right through to Monday. Thirty five members of the press had an op-

portunity to become acquainted with our Carnival customs and traditions. They were all here for the very first time; hence they had much to see apart from the Carnival events.

ATA's personnel offered the international press a combination of Carnival events and a tremendous tour.

Their excursions included a sailing trip on the Catamaran, an island tour, restaurant meals and much more.

During their lunch they met with different Carnival group leaders; they met with the King of Calypso, King of Tumba, our Carnival Queens and much more. There are no better people to talk about our Carnival than those who put so much time and creativity into the beauty we see on the roads each year.

Our visitors experienced "Jouvert Morning" and were impressed by this unique Aruban tradition, where everyone dances and enjoys themselves to Carnival music in the wee hours of the morning clad in pajamas. This was followed the same day by the spectacular magna event, the Grand Parade in San Nicolas followed by the next day: Aruba's Grand Parade in Oranjestad, a demonstration of luxury, creativity, detail, joy and good behavior. A tremendous way to live up to Aruba's motto: "One Happy Island"

It also reflects the fact that Aruba's Carnival is of high caliber and is considered one of the very best in the world.

Press members who came to Aruba this year to cover our Carnival came from: Colombia, Brazil, Scandinavia, Venezuela, the USA, Holland and Finland. Of course press people from Curacao and Bonaire were also among our press guests.

ATA congratulates SAC for their excellent work, also Fundacion MUSICA and each musical group, musical bands and other patrons of our Carnival. Special thanks to our Police Force who worked tirelessly to maintain order, Serlimar, DOW, IMSan (Ambulance & Red Cross Service). Without these persons and groups we could not have celebrated such an excellent Diamond Celebration!

ATA's entire personnel say: Thank you and Congratulations to Aruba!

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Loyal Visitors honored by Aruba Tourism Authority at Divi Tamarijn



Recently the Aruba Tourism Authority had the great pleasure to give honor to some very special guests. They were Mr. Patrick and Judith Duncan who were named Goodwill Ambassadors of Aruba.

The symbolic honorary title is presented in the name of the Minister of Tourism as a token of appreciation to guests who visit Aruba for between 10 and 20 years consecutive. The honorees are members of Divi Tamarijn and have been enjoying the Island every year.

Ms. Darline S. de Cuba representing Aruba Tourism Authority and Steve Bene Activities Supervisor conducted the ceremony at Divi Tamarijn.

Top reason for returning provided by the honorees were they consider Aruba to be indeed one "Happy Island", the great weather, and the friendly Aruban hospitality.

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Weather Update Aruba



WEATHER: SKIES PARTLY CLOUDY TO MOSTLY SUNNY AND GENERALLY DRY
MAXIMUM TEMPERATURE 31 CENTIGRADE / **MINIMUM TEMPERATURE** 26 CENTIGRADE.
SUNRISE 06:53 AM **SUNSET** 06:50 PM.
WIND: MODERATE TO STRONG EASTERLY WINDS WITH AN AVERAGE OF

20 KTS GUSTING UP TO 31 KTS.

GENERAL SITUATION: A DOMINANT HIGH PRESSURE AREA OVER THE ATLANTIC OCEAN IS RESPONSIBLE FOR MODERATE TO STRONG EASTERLY WINDS. THE ATMOSPHERE IS STABLE AND DRY HOWEVER PATCHES OF RAINCLOUDS MAY CROSS OUR AREA. IN THE EARLY MORNING HOURS INCREASING CHANCES FOR A SHORT SHOWER. THE AMOUNT OF RAINFALL IS NOT SIGNIFICANT. SAHARAN DUST MAY REDUCE VISIBILITY SOMEWHAT.
MARINE CONDITIONS: WAVE DIRECTION WILL BE EAST WITH WAVE-HEIGHTS BETWEEN 5 TO 7 FEET.

WEATHER EXPECTATIONS FOR THE REMAINDER OF THE WEEK: PARTLY CLOUDY TO MOSTLY SUNNY. AFTER MIDNIGHT AND EARLY MORNING HOURS A SLIGHT CHANCE OF A PASSING SHOWER OF SHORT DURATION. TRADEWINDS REMAIN MODERATE TO STRONG TILL FRIDAY AND AFTERWARDS DIMINISH. TEMPERATURE WILL FLUCTUATE AROUND NORMAL. SAHARAN DUST MAY REDUCE VISIBILITY A LITTLE.

Minister working on a solution to reduce AO...

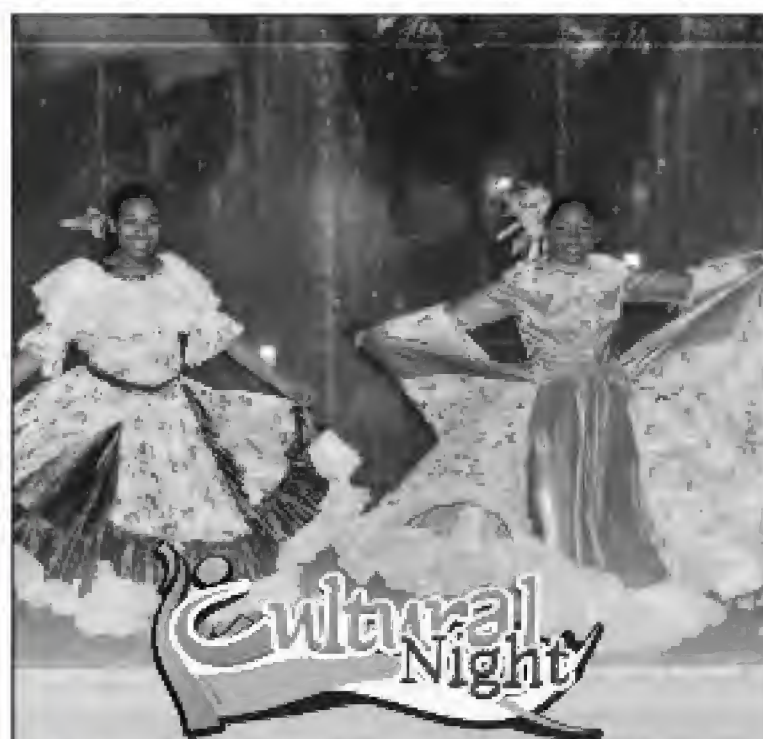
Cont. from pg 3

The level of AO in these departments is considerably lower than even the private sector.

Other departments with relatively low AO are: Department of Foreign Affairs with an AO level of 3.2%, Hulpbestuurskantoor Savaneta with 3.3%, Kustwacht 3.8%, Directie Cultuur 3.1%, University of Aruba 2.9%, S.K.O.A. 3.5%, and S.P.O.A. with 3.3%. The Minister congratulated the heads of these

departments. He also encouraged the heads of other departments to consult their colleagues who have low AO ratings to ascertain what they are doing to keep the AO's down in their departments.

The Minister indicated that the Human Resources Department is working on a management plan to improve this situation. They hope that together with the unions they can come up with a series of agreements to help reduce the



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RBC Royal Bank to host the first e-Aruba seminar



ORANJESTAD -- Mark-Benson Denz, founder of Aruba's first web-based real time news site, 24ora.com, is organizing the island's first e-Aruba Seminar, sponsored by RBC Royal Bank (Aruba). The four-hour session, scheduled for Saturday morning, April 5, will take place at the Renaissance Convention Center in Oranjestad, featuring an impressive list of inter-

nationally known guest speakers.

The topics for the talks and panel discussions are "Social Media," "Digital Marketing" and "Entrepreneurship." Guest speakers include Andres Barreto, Richard Pollack and Ramon Ray, as well as a number of local experts to pinpoint and personalize the subjects regarding reaching local audi-

ences.

Andres Barreto is a Colombian entrepreneur now based in New York and founder of Socialatom Group, Grooveshark, PulsoSocial and Onswipe. He has been featured on CNN and Fox News on many occasions. He was named in Business Week's list of Top 25 under 25, MIT Tech Review Top 10 Innovators under 35 and Inc Magazine Top 30 under 30 and is a founding fellow of the Non-Profit Coderise.

Richard J. Pollack has launched and grown more than a dozen successful companies over the past 25 years. He is founder, chairman & CEO of BeyondROI®, a business consulting and digital marketing firm. Prior to that, he served as vice president at Monster.com, acting as consultants to Global 2000 companies on Internet re-

cruitment and advertising. Before Monster, he was a digital marketing consultant at Doubleclick.

Ramon Ray is the author of the best selling book "Facebook Guide to Small Business." He is an expert and highly entertaining speaker on technology and marketing, and passionate about helping small businesses grow by educating executives about the best technology and marketing practices. Ramon has been featured on CNBC and writes for Entrepreneur Magazine.

Mark-Benson Denz will also be presenting and moderating.

After each keynote presentation, a panel discussion featuring local experts will be conducted, with a Q & A and the public invited to participate via hashtags.

"Everyone is welcome at e-Aruba," stated Mark-Ben-

son Denz, "but the information is most tailored to communications, marketing and P/R professionals, executives, students, entrepreneurs, start-ups and people who would like to start a business in the future."

Registration and information is available through their website: <http://e-aruba.com/>. Tickets are 75 Aruban florins, with a special discounted student price of 50 Aruban florins, with proof of current enrollment at an accredited facility. Tickets can be ordered and paid for online, then picked up at either Office Systems or Write Here in Eagle. Hand delivery is available for an additional fee; orders of five tickets or more will be delivered with no additional cost.

For updates on the upcoming event, the first e-Aruba Seminar can be followed on Facebook.

By Rosalie Klein

Kerry confirms discussions with Ukraine, Russia to continue

PARIS (AFP) - US Secretary of State John Kerry said Wednesday that "intense discussions" with Russia and Ukraine would continue in the coming days in the hope of securing a de-escalation of current tensions between them.

"We initiated a process today that we hope will eventually lead to de-escalation," Kerry told reporters after a day of diplomatic negotiations in Paris ended with Russia refusing to bow to Western demands for direct talks with the new Ukraine government.

Kerry said he would continue talks with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov in Rome on Thursday, where both will be for a meeting on Libya.

He said Wednesday's discussions had been constructive.

"I'd rather be where we are today than yesterday."

Kerry added: "I will be in touch with the foreign minister and prime minister of

Ukraine later tonight."

"We had very thorough discussions today."

"This is hard, tough stuff. This is very serious."

Kerry played down Lavrov's refusal to meet his Ukrainian counterpart in Paris, saying he had harboured "zero expectation" of that happening.

He also insisted that sanctions against Russia were still an option but stressed: "We would prefer to find an appropriate diplomatic solution to this."

"We made it clear that the decision to go to Crimea is not without cost."

"Now we need to go forward and see if we avoid everybody being put in a corner where it's more and more difficult to find the path that presents you with the solution of dialogue."

"I was encouraged today that Russia indicated that they would prefer to see us be able to find that path."

"That's the beginning of a negotiation."

Senate rejects Obama pick for top civil rights post

WASHINGTON (AFP) - The US Senate rejected President Barack Obama's controversial pick for a prominent civil rights post Wednesday amid a backlash over the nominee's connection to a high-profile convicted cop-killer.

Seven members of Obama's Democratic Party joined all Republicans in opposition to help torpedo the nomination of Debo Adebile to head the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division.

Adebile is a leading civil rights attorney and was part of the team which helped get Mumia Abu-Jamal's death sentence commuted to life in

prison in 2012.

Obama swiftly condemned Adebile's rejection as "a travesty based on wildly unfair character attacks against a good and qualified public servant."

"The fact that his nomination was defeated solely based on his legal representation of a defendant runs contrary to a fundamental principle of our system of justice," the president said in a statement.

The Senate controversially changed the chamber's rules last year, lowering the threshold to advance most presidential nominations to just a majority 50 votes, rather than the 60 previously needed to overcome a so-called filibuster.

But even under the new rules, the nomination failed in the Democratically controlled chamber.

Vice President Joe Biden, as president of the Senate, was on hand in the event he was needed to break a tie, but the vote fell short, 47-52.

Adebile, who had been legal counsel to the African-American civil rights group NAACP's Legal Defense Fund, has argued civil rights cases on voting rights before the US Supreme Court.

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Dalai Lama to lead US Senate prayers

WASHINGTON (AFP) - The Dalai Lama will lead the US Senate in prayer on Thursday as the exiled Tibetan spiritual leader rallies support among leaders of Congress, aides said.

It will mark the first time that the Dalai Lama -- whose activities overseas are strongly opposed by China -- will deliver the prayer that customarily opens each Senate session.

The Nobel Peace Prize winner will later meet leaders of both the Senate and House of Representatives, said Kaydor Aukatsang, a spokesman for the Office of Tibet. A Senate aide confirmed the Dalai Lama's meetings.

Last month, the Dalai Lama, who fled his homeland in 1959 for India amid an abortive uprising against Chinese rule, met President Barack Obama, the fourth consecutive sitting US leader whom the Tibetan leader has seen.

China called the meeting "gross interference" in its internal affairs and summoned a US diplomat, although it has not taken further retaliatory measures. The Dalai Lama's meeting was his third at the White House with Obama, who barred reporters and met the monk inside the executive mansion's residence rather than the Oval Office where he receives dignitaries.

The Dalai Lama, who has officially ceded his political role to a prime minister elected by exiled Tibetans, says he accepts China's rule and is peacefully seeking greater autonomy for the Himalayan region. More than 120 Tibetans have set themselves on fire in recent years to protest what they say is religious, political and cultural oppression.

The White House, in a statement after the meeting with the Dalai Lama, said that Obama expressed "his

strong support for the preservation of Tibet's unique religious, cultural, and linguistic traditions and the protection of human rights for Tibetans in the People's Republic of China."

China has described the Dalai Lama as a "wolf in monk's clothing" and accuses him of supporting Tibetan independence despite his statements.

- Support across US spectrum -

The comparatively mild Chinese reaction to Obama's latest meeting with the Dalai Lama contrasts with Beijing's strong pressure on Britain, France and several other countries whose leaders have gone ahead and met the exiled leader.

Congress has been instrumental in pushing for strong US support to the Dalai Lama, who traditionally has enjoyed wide backing across the political spectrum in often polarized Washington.

REMEMBER

to



**Buckle
up**

I am no superman, says Pope Francis

VATICAN CITY (AFP) - Pope Francis may whip crowds up into a frenzy and have ardent followers across the globe but the pontiff insists he is no "superman".

"I don't like... the Pope Francis mythology," he said in an interview marking his first year in office published Wednesday in Italy's *Corriere della Sera* daily.

"Painting the pope as a sort of superman, a sort of star, seems offensive," he said. "The pope is a man who laughs, who cries, who sleeps soundly and has friends like everyone else. A normal person."

The 77-year-old, known for his gentle smile and infectious energy, has built up a following of over 12 million people on Twitter since his election last March and is re-tweeted more than those of US President Barack Obama.

Francis in January featured on the cover of *Rolling Stone* magazine, which hailed his relaxed style and less aggressive stance than his predecessors on hot-button issues like homosexuality.

In January, an image of him as superman, flying through the air with his white cape billowing out behind, was graffitied onto a wall in Rome -- and re-tweeted by the Vatican.

Speeding forwards with his fist raised, the pontiff -- crucifix swinging in the wind -- carried his trademark black bag, with the word "values" on it.

Francis was tipped this week as a favourite among 278 nominees for the Nobel Peace Prize, on the basis of his efforts to redistribute global wealth.

The Argentine, who rose from modest beginnings to become the first non-European pope in nearly 1,300 years, was named last year by *Time* magazine as its person of the year.



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Saudi, Bahrain, UAE recall envoys to Qatar

RIYADH (AFP) - Three Gulf monarchies recalled their ambassadors from Doha Wednesday in an unprecedented escalation in tension with fellow Gulf Cooperation Council member Qatar, accused of backing the widely banned Muslim Brotherhood.

Regional heavyweight Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain said the decision was made in protest against Qatar's alleged interference in their internal affairs. Doha said it regretted the recall of its envoys but would not follow suit.

GCC nations "have exerted massive efforts to contact Qatar on all levels to agree on a unified policy... to ensure non-interference, directly or indirectly, in the internal affairs of any member state," the three states announced in a joint statement.

They said they had asked Qatar, a perceived supporter of the Muslim Brotherhood, which is banned in most Gulf states, "not to support any party aiming to threaten the security and stability of any GCC member," citing antagonistic media campaigns.

Critics accuse the influential

Doha-based Al-Jazeera satellite channel of biased coverage in favour of the Muslim Brotherhood, and several of its journalists are on trial in Egypt for allegedly supporting the group.

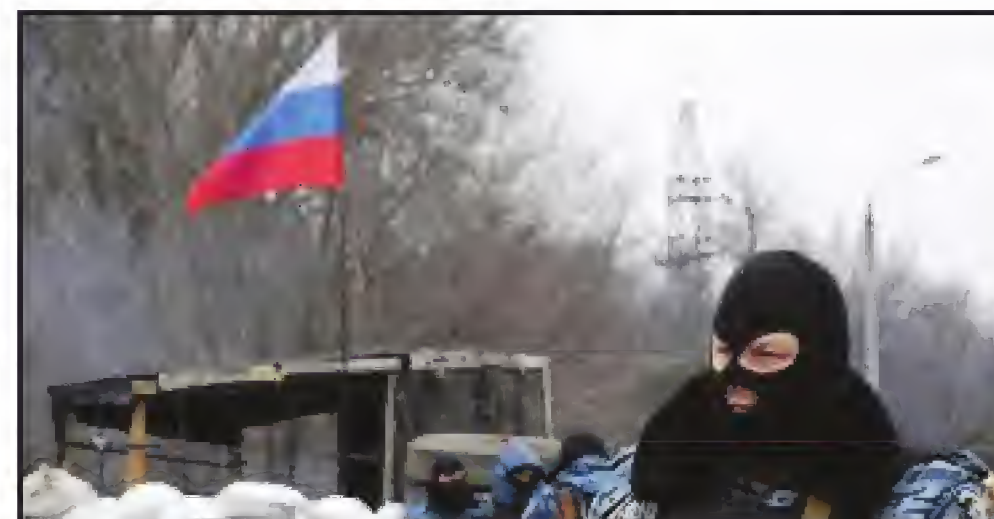
The joint statement said Doha had failed to comply with a commitment by Qatar's emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani to non-interference, made during a summit in Riyadh last year with Kuwait's emir and the Saudi monarch.

During the tripartite meeting in Riyadh in November, Kuwait's emir Sheikh Sabah al-Ahmad al-Sabah had tried to ease tensions between Saudi King Abdullah and Sheikh Tamim.

The pan-Arab Al-Hayat daily reported that the "marathon" talks lasted nine hours because of "differences on several issues, among them inter-Gulf relations".

Qatar said the recalls were linked to "differences over issues outside the Gulf Cooperation Council", apparently referring to Egypt, where Doha supported Islamist president Mohamed Morsi while most Gulf countries hailed his overthrow by the army.

Nicaragua plays down report of Russian base for military resupply



MANAGUA (AFP) - Nicaragua on Tuesday shrugged off the idea of Russia building a military resupply base in this Central American nation after a suggestion last week by the Russian defense chief.

In Ukraine, pro-Kremlin forces are in de facto control of the strategic, majority-Russian Crimean peninsula, where Ukrainian troops remain blocked inside their barracks in the most serious stand-off between the West and Russia since the end of the Cold War.

Crimea is a top strategic interest for Russia since it hosts Moscow's only warm-water port open year round.

On February 26 Russian defense chief Sergei Shoigu

told RIA Novosti that Russia was weighing increasing its military presence in countries including Nicaragua, Cuba and Venezuela -- particularly bases to refuel Russian warplanes far from home.

But Army Chief General Julio Aviles said in Managua this was just "speculation. And people speculate quite a bit." Aviles stressed that Nicaragua's constitution only allows for other countries' militaries and materiel to transit the country for humanitarian or training purposes -- and only then, with the permission of lawmakers and the government.

All three of the countries Shoigu mentioned are leftist allies and harsh critics of the United States.

Eating too much meat and eggs is 'just as bad as smoking': study

NEW YORK - Middle-aged people who eat protein-rich food are four times more likely to die of cancer than someone who only eats a little, according to a new study.

The researchers said eating a lot of protein increased the risk of cancer almost as much as smoking 20 cigarettes a day.

They reached their findings, published in the journal *Cell Metabolism*, after tracking thousands of people over 20 years.

A high-protein diet was defined as one in which 20 per

cent of the calories came from protein. They recommended eating 0.8g of protein per kilogram of body weight a day during middle age.

However the researchers said protein had benefits during later life.

However Dr Gunter Kuhnle, a food nutrition scientist at the University of Reading, criticised the study for making a link to smoking.

"The smoker thinks: 'Why bother quitting smoking if my cheese and ham sandwich is just as bad for me?'" he said.

Breakthrough in long-lasting AIDS drugs in monkeys

WASHINGTON (AFP) - A single shot of antiretroviral drugs protected lab monkeys from the AIDS virus for weeks, according to two US trials released on Tuesday that open the way to tests on humans.

In separate work, two teams of virologists found that monkeys which received a monthly injection of a prototype drug were completely shielded from the simian equivalent of HIV.

The research builds on previous trials showing that people who take a small daily doses of antiretroviral drugs can slash their risk of being infected by an HIV-positive partner by more than 90 percent.

But this protection was far lower when participants failed to take the drugs each day, highlighting the need for a monthly or quarterly injection to avert the problem.

In one of the studies, conducted at the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), researchers gave a monthly shot of an experimental, delayed-effect antiretroviral drug called GSK744 to six fe-

male monkeys.

Twice a week they inserted into their vagina a liquid containing a human-simian immunodeficiency virus to simulate their having had intercourse with an infected male.

None of the females treated with GSK744 became infected, but six from a control group that were treated with a placebo all became infected quickly.

The other researchers, from the Aaron Diamond AIDS Research Center at the Rockefeller University in New York, tested the same drug on 15 monkeys, but this time exposing them to the risk of anal infection. The results were identical -- none of the treated animals was infected, but all those on placebo were infected.

A first clinical trial with 175 people is expected to begin later this year in the United States, Brazil, South Africa and Malawi with GSK744, which was developed by the British pharmaceutical firm GlaxoSmithKline.

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Major report reveals 'extensive' abuse of women in EU

VIENNA (AFP) - A huge and damning new report revealed Wednesday "extensive" physical or sexual abuse against women across the EU, with one in three falling victim but far too few going to the police.

In addition, five percent of the 42,000 women interviewed said they have been raped, and just over one in 10 experienced sexual violence by an adult before they were 15, according to the survey by the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA).

The report "shows that physical, sexual and psychological violence against women is an extensive human rights abuse in all EU Member States," the Vienna-based group's director Morten Kjaerum said.

Just over one in three women has experienced physical or sexual assault, and one in five from either a current or previous partner.

With the potential emotional and psychological consequences "long-lasting and deep-seated", Kjaerum called for measures "to be taken to a new level now".

The FRA, which talked face-to-face with at least 1,500 women aged 18-74 in each of the European Union's 28 countries, said this was the most comprehensive study of its kind to date, both in the EU and worldwide.

"What emerges is a picture of extensive abuse that affects many women's lives, but is systematically under-reported to the authorities," Kjaerum said.

The FRA probed women's experiences of physical, sexual and psychological violence including domestic abuse, as



well as stalking, sexual harassment, childhood experiences and the role of the Internet.

It highlighted how few women go to the authorities.

"Only 14 percent of women reported their most serious incident of intimate partner violence to the police, and 13 percent reported their most serious incident of non-partner violence to the police," Kjaerum said.

Over a fifth of the victims of sexual violence suffered from panic attacks, over a third became depressed and 43 percent spoke of difficulty in subsequent relationships as a result.

There were surprising differences between countries, although the FRA stressed that this could be due to a number of factors and not necessarily because levels of violence were higher.

Nordic countries, for example, came off badly, with 52 percent of women in Denmark saying they have suffered physical and/or sexual abuse, while the rate was 47 percent in Finland and 46 percent in Sweden.

At the other end of the scale, the report found that 19 percent of women in Poland

said they had suffered in the same way, 20 percent in Austria and 21 percent in Croatia.

Angela Beausang, head of the Swedish women's refuge network Roks, told AFP that the higher figure for Sweden was because women there are more aware of the law and how they can get help.

In Denmark, Karin Helweg-Larsen, a researcher at the National Institute of Public Health, went so far as to describe the country differences as "grotesque".

Croatia has "been through one of the bloodiest civil wars in Europe for many years. Of course many of those women experienced violence during that period," she said.

Birgit Soederberg, chairwoman of LOKK, an umbrella organisation for Danish women's crisis centres, nevertheless said the figures were "alarmingly high".

"We are lagging well behind on a number of parameters. For example, in Denmark we don't want to criminalise the buying of sex and the view of women that entails," she told Ritzau news agency.

Web site: <http://fra.europa.eu/en>

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'Must-see' Louis Vuitton show wraps up Paris fashion week

PARIS (AFP) - Nicolas Ghesquiere's much-anticipated debut for Louis Vuitton was the "must-see" show of Paris fashion week, providing a star-studded finale and opening a new chapter for the luxury brand after the departure of Marc Jacobs.

Chinese actress Fan Bingbing, one of Asia's biggest stars, Catherine Deneuve, Princess Charlene of Monaco and one-time mentor Jean Paul Gaultier were among the VIPs on the front row to see the prodigiously talented former Balenciaga designer's first collection.

On the catwalk, Ghesquiere rang the changes with a collection of logo-free clothes with a retro feel.

And in contrast to showman Jacobs -- famed for turning his shows into spectacles -- there wasn't a carousel or mini-train in sight.

Leather featured not just in the bags but also in pieces worked into the clothes in a wintry palette of black, beiges, browns and splashes of Ghesquiere's favourite "sporty" red.

Ghesquiere's skirts were short, gently flared and cinched at the waist. Trousers were tight-fitting. Everything was high-waisted and teamed with strappy or patent ankle boots.

Outlining his vision back-



stage after the show, Ghesquiere said he had in mind a woman who was at home mixing pieces in a way that was both modern and effortless.

Jacobs was given a standing ovation at Paris fashion week last October when he bowed out after 16 years at the helm to concentrate on a stock exchange flotation of his own brand.

The US designer -- under whose stewardship "Vuitton mania" saw queues around department stores -- is credited with taking Vuitton from "stodgy luggage house" to one of the most sought-after brands in the world, particularly in the lucrative Asian market.

After years of rapid global expansion, Ghesquiere is expected to steer the brand towards a more upmarket,

exclusive image.

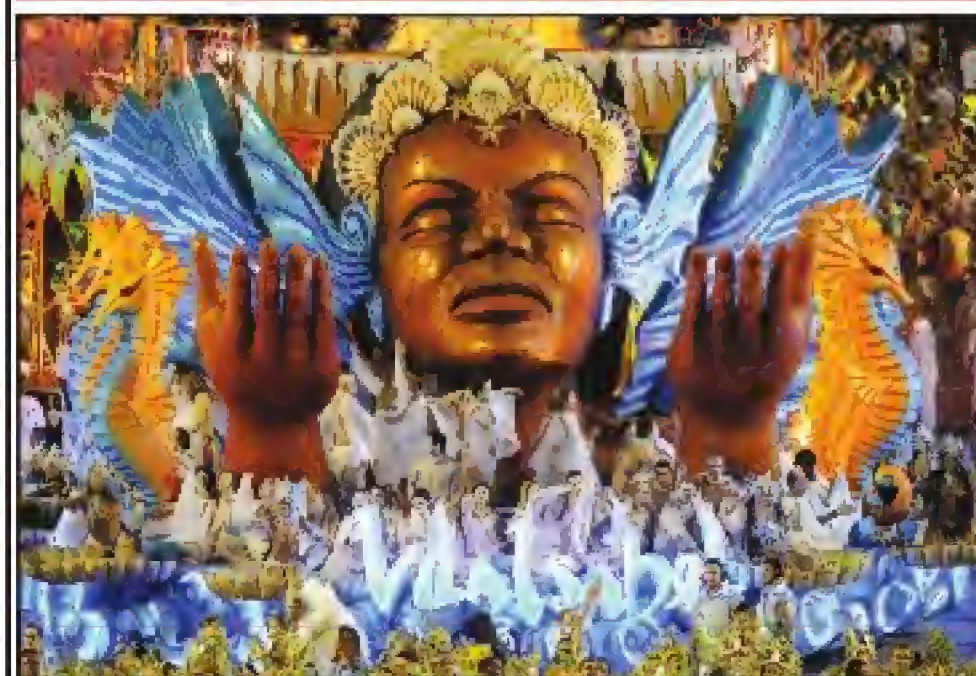
The company turned in sales estimated at 7.3 billion euros (9.9 billion) in 2012 with leather goods estimated to account for 90 percent of sales.

Ghesquiere said he would be working to integrate the bags into clothes in one harmonious look.

And he said he was thrilled to be back designing after his post-Balenciaga break from the industry.



Rio Carnival



RIO DE JANEIRO (AFP) - Revelers of the Vila Isabel samba school performs during the second night of carnival parade at the Sambadrome in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil on Tuesday.



Revelers of the Vila Isabel samba school perform atop a float during the second night of carnival parade at the Sambadrome in Rio de Janeiro on Tuesday.

Rio de Janeiro has long been regarded as the Carnival Capital of the World. Foreign visitors to it alone number around 500,000 every year. Rio Carnival is a wild 5 days celebration, 40 days before Easter. It officially starts on Friday and finishes on Fat Tuesday with the beginning of Lent on Ash Wednesday.

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Game play remains at heart of changing lifestyles

SAN FRANCISCO (AFP) - For almost as long as there have been computers, there have been people intent in playing games with them.

Since young programmers at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology came up with "Spacewar!" some 50 years ago, the world of videogames has exploded into a multi-billion-dollar industry.

"From the earliest days of computer, these folks went after computer graphics and went after videogames," Gartner consumer technologies research director Brian Blau told AFP. "People enjoy games, and marrying the concept of real-world games with a computer and interactivity is really powerful."

Gartner predicts the worldwide videogame market combining console, online, mobile, and personal computer offer-



ings will expand from \$101 billion this year to \$111 billion next year and top \$128 billion in 2017.

While play on high-performance desktop or laptop computers has long captivated hardcore videogame lovers, rival console makers Microsoft, Sony, and Nintendo have successfully turned games into standard family household entertainment during the past 20 years, with Xbox, PlaySta-

tion and Wii hardware respectively.

New-generation Xbox One and PlayStation 4 consoles released late last year are credited with bringing new life to a section of the market under pressure from the popularity of smartphones and tablets.

But Nintendo's latest console, Wii U, has had trouble gaining traction among players.

Facebook out to buy solar drone maker: report

SAN FRANCISCO (AFP) - Facebook is in talks to buy a solar-powered drone startup in what could lead to making wireless Internet available in regions without online access, according to technology news website TechCrunch.

TechCrunch cited an unidentified source as disclosing that the leading social network is considering buying Titan Aerospace for about \$60 million.

Facebook declined to comment Tuesday on what it referred to in an email to AFP as "rumors and speculation."

Titan Aerospace makes high-altitude, solar-powered drones that can fly for as long as five years without touching down.

Facebook-backed Internet.org, which has a stated mission of making online access available everywhere in the world, could put such drones to work as airborne wireless hotspots.

Aerospace Titan would start by making about 11,000 drones to fly above Africa and other parts of the world with minimal to no Internet access, according to TechCrunch.

Aerospace Titan was founded in 2012 and has its headquarters in the state of New Mexico where it handles research and development.

The takeover, if confirmed, would come as Google works on a Project Loon to spread Internet access using balloons.

Yahoo to Drop Google, Facebook Log-Ins



NEW YORK - Yahoo has begun the gradual phase-out of letting people access certain services with their Facebook or Google logins. Now, to sign into all services, users will need a Yahoo ID. The first service to stop allowing other login credentials was Yahoo Sports Tourney Pick'Em up; and soon services like Flickr and Fantasy Sports will also require a Yahoo ID. Yahoo CEO Marissa Mayer has made it clear that she wants to transform the company into a mobile content portal with deep personalization to drive user experience and monetization. Since Mayer took the helm in 2012, she has refreshed Yahoo Mail and Yahoo Finance, and launched Yahoo News Digest. Just in the last year, Yahoo has acquired 30 companies.

Four women with transplanted wombs receive embryos

STOCKHOLM (AFP) - Four Swedish women with transplanted uteruses have received test-tube embryos in a cutting-edge bid to fall pregnant, Swedish researchers said.

"I cannot verify if any of them are pregnant or not," Mats Braennstroem, head of the research team at Sweden's Gothenburg University, told AFP. "We will wait until late pregnancy to release any data on that."

The embryos -- produced by in-vitro fertilisation -- were transferred into the transplanted wombs during the past month.

The researchers said "the

prospects for success are good", but they did not expect all four women to get pregnant on the first attempt.

"In some patients we will surely have to repeat the procedure several times until we get a good pregnancy," Braennstroem said.

The patients are part of a group of nine who had received transplants of wombs donated by close relatives since September 2012.

In two cases, the transplant was unsuccessful and the womb had to be removed.

Another three women are expected to receive embryos in late March or early April.

The world's first transplant of a uterus, donated by a 46-year-old to a 26-year-old, took place in Saudi Arabia in 2002.

Although blood clots forced doctors to remove the transplanted organ after 14 weeks, they claimed technical success.



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Chevron wins US case against \$9.5 bn Ecuador fine

NEW YORK (AFP) - A US judge Tuesday upheld Chevron's allegations that an Ecuadoran court decision ordering it to pay \$9.5 billion for oil pollution in the Amazon jungle was fraudulently obtained.

US District Judge Lewis Kaplan concluded that plaintiffs in the 2011 case and their lawyers committed a host of corrupt actions, including ghost-writing the original judgment, submitting fraudulent evidence and bribery.

In barring enforcement of the original fine in US courts, the decision handed Chevron a big win in its long fight with Ecuador.

But it was a setback to the indigenous people from Ecuador's oil-rich Lago Agrio in the eastern Ecuador region of Oriente, who have long sought compensation for pollution by US oil company Texaco between the 1970s and early 1990s.

They allege that Texaco, which was bought by Chevron in 2001, dumped oilfield waste that polluted large swathes of the jungle region, causing widespread sickness and a surge in deaths from cancer.

Chevron has insisted it cannot be held responsible, and ar-

gued that corruption underpinned the massive fine ordered by the Ecuador court.

Kaplan said Steven Donziger, the New York lawyer who has represented the Ecuadoran plaintiffs since the 1990s, and his allies secretly paid off the authors of an ostensibly independent report on the pollution damages that was requested by the court.

In addition, he said, "Ultimately the (Donziger team) wrote the Lago Agrio court's judgment themselves and promised \$500,000 to the Ecuadoran judge to rule in their favor and sign their judgment," Kaplan said.

"If ever there was a case warranting equitable relief with respect to a judgment procured by fraud, this is it," Kaplan wrote. Chevron called the ruling "a resounding victory for Chevron and our shareholders." "It confirms that the Ecuadoran judgment against Chevron is a fraud and the product of a criminal enterprise."

Kaplan concluded that Chevron "might bear some responsibility" for pollution in Ecuador.

Witnesses in the case included a former Ecuadoran judge who admitted to accepting bribes.

Representatives of the plaintiffs and Donziger vowed to appeal.

Han Shan, a spokesman for Ecuadoran villagers, said they would continue to press to enforce the Ecuadoran ruling in other countries where Chevron does business. Chevron has no significant assets in Ecuador.

Lago Agrio plaintiffs plan to press on with suits against Chevron in Argentina, Brazil, Canada and possibly other jurisdictions.

Severe winter weather hurts US growth: Fed Beige Book

WASHINGTON (AFP) - Severe winter weather hit US economic activity in January and early February but the outlook in most areas "remained optimistic", the Federal Reserve's Beige Book survey said Wednesday.

The regional review, which is used by Fed officials to set monetary policy, said unusually harsh storms had hit manufacturing, retail and auto sales and construction, contributing to sluggish growth data.

Growth was just "modest to moderate" across eight of the 12 Fed regions, stable in one and slower in three: New York, Philadelphia and Chicago -- all battered by intense snowstorms during the period.

Employment continued to increase in most areas, while price and wage pressures were mostly subdued. As in recent months, the report highlighted shortages in specialized skilled labor.

Even so, the report concluded. "The outlook among most districts remained optimistic."

The issue of what lay behind a series of disappointing economic indicators since December has worried analysts and investors.

While many have accepted the weather explanation, others



have worried that a more fundamental slowdown has taken place.

Last week Fed Chair Janet Yellen said it was "quite clear" that the intense storms that have battered much of the country are a factor, but that Fed policymakers were studying the data.

The issue is key to Fed policy. The Federal Open Market Committee began a plan to steadily reduce its stimulus program in December, with an eye to winding it up completely later this year.

The FOMC will meet on March 18 and 19 to consider a fresh cut to the now \$65 billion a month stimulus, and Yellen allowed that if the economy has slowed for non-weather reasons, the stimulus taper could be reconsidered.

"If there's a significant

change in the outlook, certainly we would be open to reconsidering, but I wouldn't want to jump to conclusions here," she said.

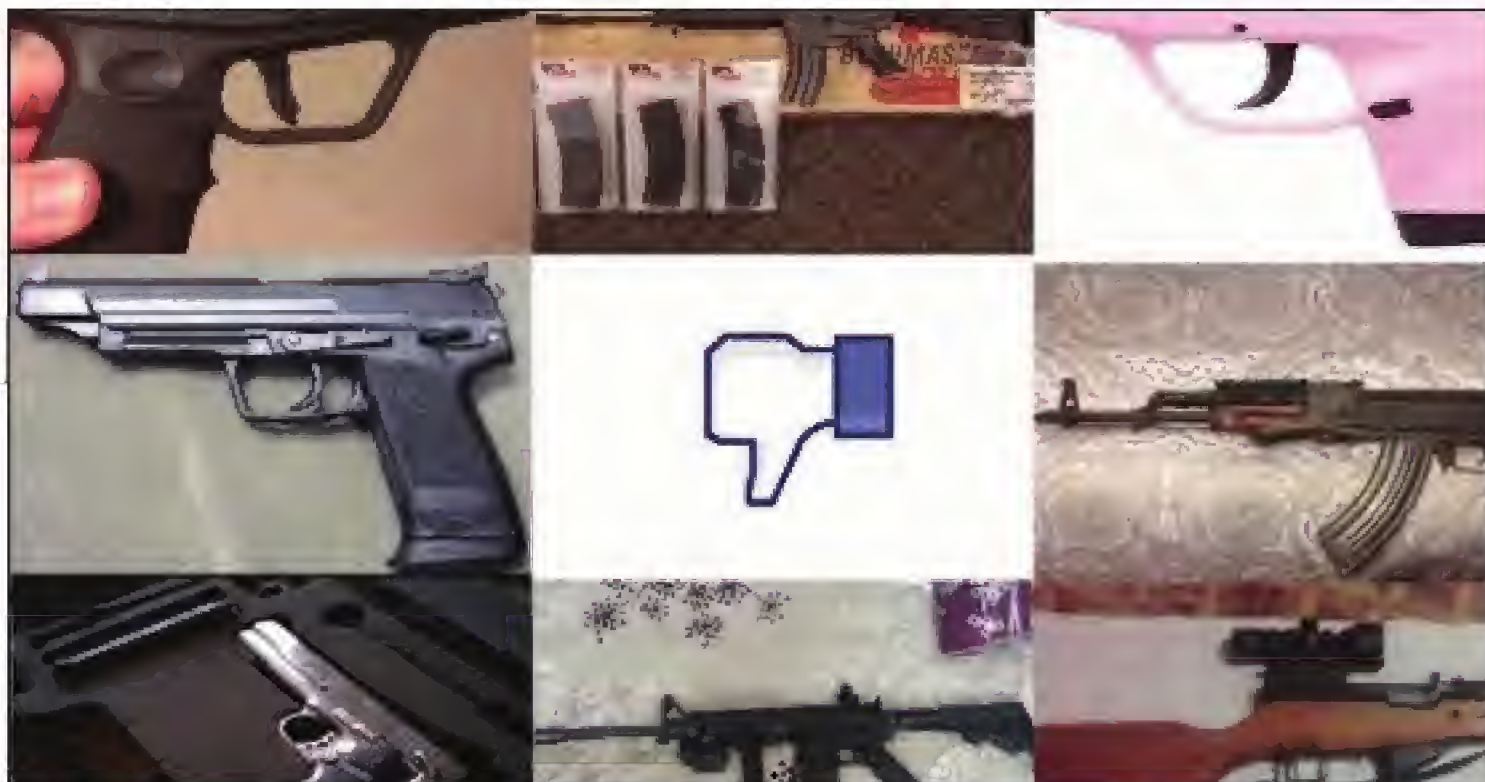
Speaking at a swearing-in event on Wednesday, Yellen, who became Fed chair on February 1, did not raise the weather issue.

But she noted that the economy still had far to go before the FOMC needs to tighten policy and hike interest rates.

"I will also continue the work of helping repair the damage done by the financial crisis to the economy," she said.

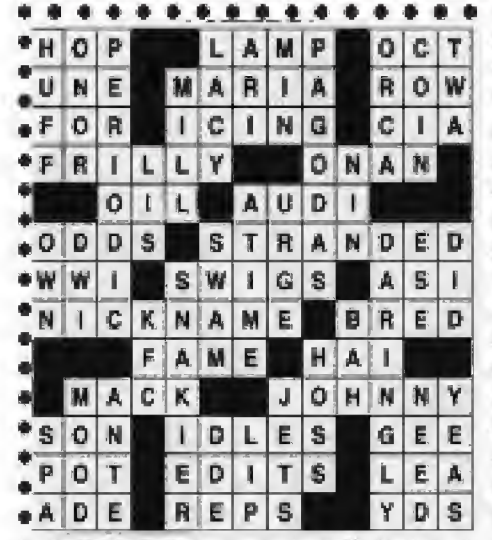
"Too many Americans still can't find a job or are forced to work part-time. The goals set by Congress for the Federal Reserve are clear: maximum employment and stable prices."

Facebook announces steps to stop illegal gun sales



SAN FRANCISCO (AFP) - Facebook is taking aim at people who are using the social network or Instagram photo-sharing platform to sell guns. The social network will block members under 18 years of age from viewing pages or timeline posts reported to involve private gun sales and will set up online "checkpoints" warning people that such deals may be illegal. People offering guns for sale on Facebook will not be allowed to indicate that background checks are not required or that sales will be done across state lines without involving licensed firearms dealers, Bickert noted. The California-based company said that it worked with New York attorney general Eric Schneiderman and advocacy groups to modify policies to fight illegal gun sales. "Responsible social media sites know that it is in no one's interest for their sites to become a 21st century black market in dangerous and illegal goods that place our families and communities at risk," Schneiderman said in a statement praising Facebook's move. Facebook and Instagram will remove content that represents a "direct, credible risk" to users and notify police when appropriate, according to Bickert.

YESTERDAY'S Crossword Answer



COMICS

PICKLES



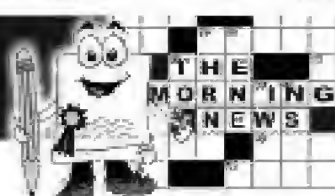
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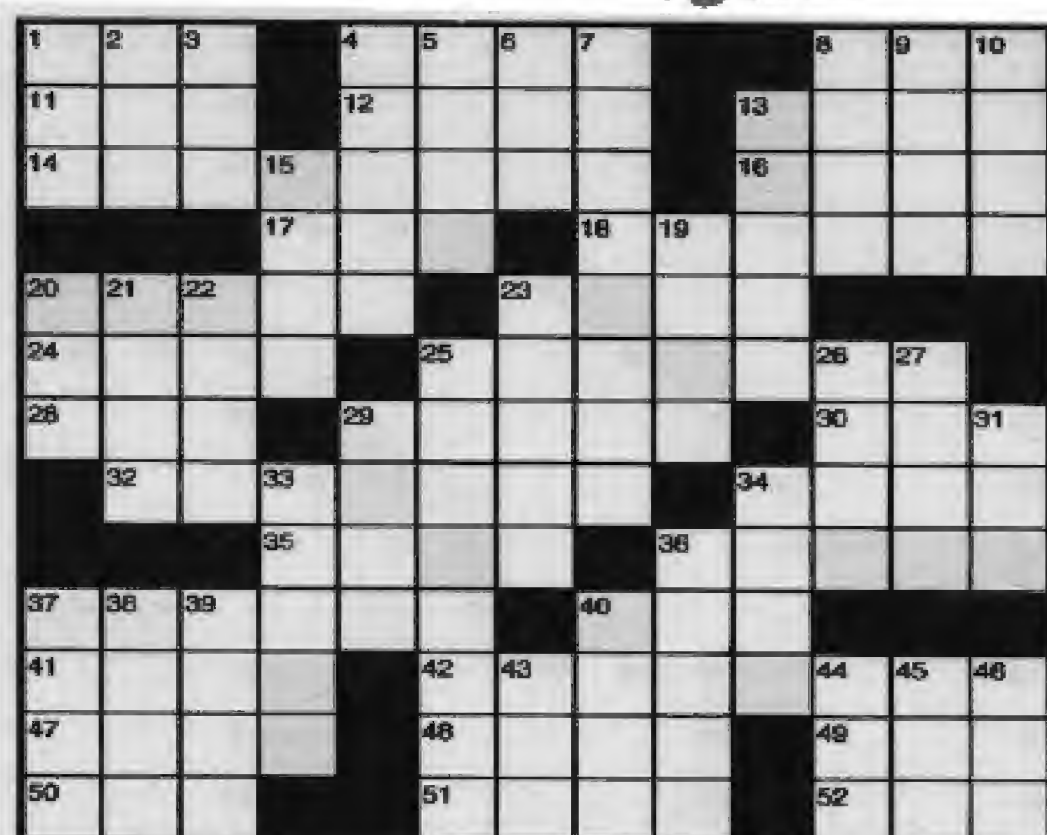
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ACROSS

1. Singer Davis
4. Guitar neck attachment
8. Feminine pronoun
11. Edible grain
12. "The peak like thith"
13. "Cast ____" (2000 film)
14. "____ Morningstar"
16. TV style guru Berkus
17. Ship letters
18. Tattered
20. Scow
23. "War is ____"
24. Lincoln and

Burrows

25. Spikers' aides, in volleyball
28. Basketball org.
29. Stalks prey
30. Musket ending
32. Math class
34. Have a meal
35. In a lazy manner
36. Gasps
37. Town crier's cry (2 wds.)
40. Also not
41. Devil's play
42. Estrange
47. Brooks and Tormé
48. Pepper's mate
49. French

negative

50. ____ and outs
51. Former spouses
52. Benji, e.g.

DOWN

1. Dad's companion
2. Org. that helps motorists
3. Middle (abbr.)
4. At hand
5. Snobbish ways
6. "____ Love You" (2 wds.)
7. Musical drama
8. Loot
9. Loathe
10. Regarded

13. Geometry term
15. Ewers
19. Elevations (abbr.)
20. Forbid
21. "Dancing Queen" singers
22. True
23. Mr. Higgins
25. Rent from a renter
26. Harness part
27. Used FedEx
29. Actress Lamarr
31. Dweller (abbr.)
33. Maidens
34. Mild oath
36. Rhyme makers
37. Half (prefix)
38. Tied
39. Feels sick
40. Cairo's river
43. Neglectful
44. By ____ large
45. Also
46. School subject (abbr.)



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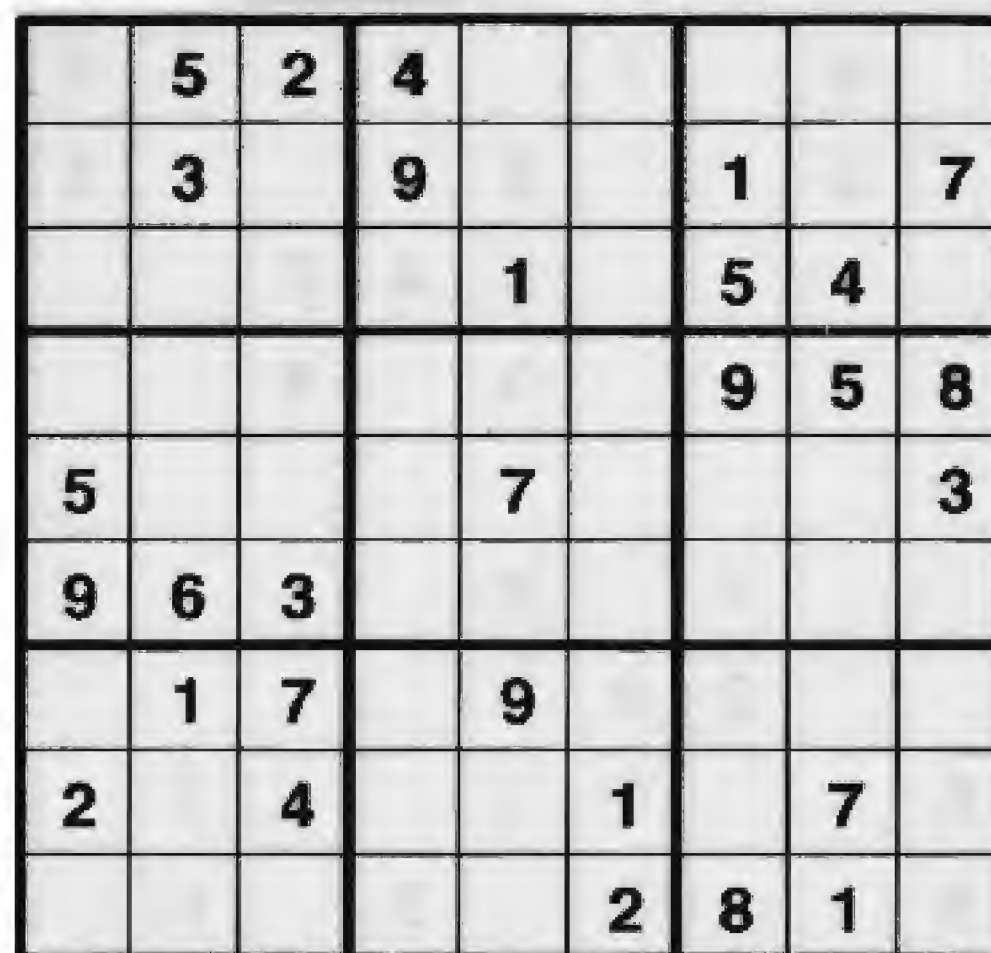
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Sudoku



SOLUTION

4	1	8	2	8	2	9	6	8
6	2	9	1	5	8	7	8	2
5	8	2	7	6	8	2	1	9
1	2	2	8	7	9	8	9	6
8	9	6	6	2	1	9	8	5
8	9	8	9	6	2	1	7	2
2	4	8	1	9	6	2	8	
2	8	1	6	2	8	9	6	7
9	6	8	2	8	7	2	9	1

Complete the grid so that every row and every column contains the numbers 1 through 9
A number is Never repeated in a row or column.
In addition every rectangle must contain the numbers 1 through 9

TAJ MAHAL; Taste of INDIA - If you like your Indian food authentic, or are looking for a new and unique dining experience, an evening at Taj Mahal will deliver a memorable meal. A seemingly endless menu offers scores of choices for fish, chicken, lamb and vegetarian dishes that are "the real deal;" discover that Indian food goes way beyond curry!

Taj Mahal's Tai Choice is a great way to start the meal and be initiated into the joys of Indian cuisine, offering a diverse selection of traditional favorites. It contains hearty portions of Pakoras, crispy vegetarian fritters, Aloo Tikka, potato cutlets, Chicken Tikka, tender chicken breast pieces seasoned just right, and shaped and seasoned ground lamb, charmingly dubbed "Sheik Kebabs." All is served on a bed of sliced onions and brought to your table on a sizzling platter, and you will want to dish those sautéed onions on to one of their tasty Indian breads called Naan, leaving behind not a single crumb.

Main dishes are accompanied by a choice of rice, mixed vegetables rich with garlic, or Naan, plain, buttered, onion or garlic, and you will want to order an extra basket or two of this tasty de-



light, on which you can spoon your main course, as well. Poori is crispy fried naan, and most definitely worth the extra two dollars to sample with your meal. Located behind the Royal Plaza Mall, Taj Mahal offers a dining experience that is truly out of the ordinary; they feature an excellent and tasty selection for vegetarians too. If you are a fan of Indian food, or have been toying with trying it, Taj Mahal is the place for a very affordable dining experience and the real deal!

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Football: Below par Messi and Argentina fail to impress

BUCHAREST (AFP) - Argentina didn't do their tag as World Cup contenders much good on Wednesday as they laboured to a 0-0 draw against Romania in a friendly which also saw Lionel Messi struggle with illness.

Argentina -- who are grouped with Iran, debutants Bosnia-Herzegovina and African champions Nigeria in Brazil -- were hindered by a clearly under the weather Messi, who played the whole of the match despite being physically sick seven minutes in.

Argentinian coach Alex Sabella started with pretty much his first choice side with Messi in the playmaking role while Sergio Aguero and Gonzalo Higuain were the strike force and other regulars such as Angel di Maria, Javier Mascherano and Pablo Zabaleta also featured.

With Messi not at his best little of note was created in a first-half which saw few chances for either side.

However, Romanian midfielder Alexandre Maxim should have done better when he was found unmarked in the 33rd minute but he aimed his downward header straight at Monaco 'keeper Sergio Romero who kept it out with his legs.

The Romanian midfielder thought he had atoned for that miss when he fired home into



Javier Mascherano (R) of Argentina vies for the ball against Alexandru Bourceanu (L) of Romania

the far corner five minutes later but the linesman ruled that the ball had gone out when it was crossed into the box.

The visitors had their best chance of the first-half a minute later as a piece of individual magic from Aguero saw him slip past two defenders and into the box only to miss the target.

Maxim was withdrawn at half-time -- one of two Romanian changes -- while Sabella kept his side unchanged with Messi seemingly recovered.

Aguero had an early chance in the second-half as he slipped free of the home defence but he took the ball too wide and his shot was cleared for a corner which was the last piece of notable action for him as he was taken off and replaced by Rodrigo Palacio.

Messi was still not 100% and it was left to others to trouble the Romanians with Zabaleta and Palacios combining in the 65th minute to set up Higuain but his shot shaved the post.

The ponderous Palacios was at fault for a terrible miss with 20 minutes remaining.

Di Maria got free on the left and found Palacios five yards out but he stumbled over the ball and saw it drift wide.

Di Maria also let a golden opportunity go abegging as Zabaleta found him with a brilliant 60 yard ball but his volley went high over the bar.

Argentina nearly won it five minutes from time as Messi clipped over the defence to find Palacios who then sent over a teasing cross but Higuain's volley was tipped over the bar.

Football: Colombia, without Falcao, held by Tunisia

BARCELONA (AFP) - Colombia drew 1-1 with Tunisia in a pre-World Cup friendly on Wednesday as the South Americans' lack of a cutting edge in the absence of star striker Radamel Falcao was exposed.

With Los Cafeteros' World Cup opener against Greece just over three months away, coach Jose Pekerman gave a number of his fringe players the chance to shine as Christian Zapata, Fredy Guarin, Jackson Martinez all started on the bench.

Falcao's Monaco teammate James Rodriguez opened the scoring from the penalty spot after Tunisian keeper Farouk Ben Mustapha had felled Victor Ibarbo after 20 minutes.

Tunisia responded well, though, and were level 15 minutes later when Wahbi Khazri drilled home Yassin Mikari's cross.

Colombia, who will also face Ivory Coast and Japan in the group stages of the World Cup, had the lion's share of



Colombia's defender Pablo Armero (R) vies with Tunisia's forward Fakhreddine Ben Youssef (L)

possession after the break.

However, without Falcao, who is struggling to make the World Cup after suffering knee ligament damage in January, and Martinez they didn't have the killer touch to turn their domination of the ball into goals.

Mustapha made amends for

conceding the penalty when he saved bravely from Fiorentina's Juan Cuadrado.

Colombia were forced to see out the final 10 minutes with 10 men when Luis Perea saw a second yellow card for chopping down Fakhreddine Ben Youssef as he broke clear on goal.



SOWETO (AFP) - Neymar scored a hat-trick as Brazil ended a run of narrow victories over South Africa by cruising to a 5-0 triumph at Soccer City stadium in Soweto on Wednesday. A much-hyped friendly between the last and next World Cup hosts lacked bite as the 'Selecao' exploited woeful Bafana Bafana (The Boys) defending. Oscar opened the scoring on 10 minutes, Neymar struck once in the first half and twice in the second, and Fernandinho got on the scoresheet as well. Brazil had won four previous games between the countries since 1996 -- all by one-goal margins -- but showed no mercy this time. It was the final warm-up for the 2014 World Cup title favourites before the May announcement of the 23-man World Cup squad. Coach Gordon Igesund has been branded a 'dead man walking' after poor tournament results and this loss greatly lessens his chances of a new contract in mid-year. Igesund looked understandably glum as he said: "Brazil played much better than us and the first and third goals were bad ones to concede."



TOKYO (AFP) - Manchester United bench-warmer Shinji Kagawa scored his first international goal for six months in a message to his boss David Moyes, as Japan beat New Zealand 4-2 in a friendly on Wednesday. A total of four goals in the first 17 minutes, including a brace from Mainz striker Shinji Okazaki, sealed victory for the Blue Samurai in their last international match before coach Alberto Zaccheroni selects his 23-strong squad in early May for the World Cup in Brazil. Leicester City striker Chris Wood scored twice to save the All Whites' blushes. Kagawa has only played in nine of United's 27 Premier-ship matches this season under Moyes without scoring or assisting a goal. He was clipped down when he took a cross from new AC Milan signing Keisuke Honda and dribbled into the area in the seventh minute. The 24-year-old attacking midfielder jumped for joy after sinking a shot from the penalty spot past keeper Glen Moss for Japan's second goal of the night. Japan played without two Europe-based first-team regulars -- Schalke defender Atsuto Uchida and Nuremberg midfielder Makoto Hasebe -- due to injuries.

NHL: Lightning deal St. Louis to Rangers, Stamkos back

TAMPA (AFP) - The Tampa Bay Lightning traded captain Martin St. Louis to the New York Rangers just hours before Wednesday's National Hockey League trade deadline, while welcoming back injured star Steven Stamkos.

The Rangers swapped captains with the Lightning, sending Ryan Callahan, a 2015 first-round NHL Draft choice and a conditional second-round pick in the 2014 draft in exchange for St. Louis, who has 369 goals in 1,041 career NHL games.

St. Louis, the 38-year-old reigning NHL scoring champion, reportedly asked to be traded after Lightning general manager Steve Yzerman, who selected the Canadian Olympic squad, left him off the original lineup.

Yzerman had also snubbed St. Louis for a spot on Canada's 2010 Vancouver Olympic gold medal team and although St. Louis joined the 2014 squad as an injury substitute for Stamkos, who is just now back from a broken right leg, he was mainly a reserve in the gold medal lineup.

St. Louis, who helped Tampa Bay win the 2004 Stanley Cup in a season when he was named the NHL's Most Valuable Player, has 29 goals and 32 assists to lead point production for the Lightning this season.

While St. Louis will reunite

with former Tampa Bay teammate Brad Richards on the Rangers and has one year remaining on his contract, Callahan remains set to become a free agent at the end of the season.

Callahan, 28, played for the United States at the Sochi Olympics last month. He has spent his entire eight-year NHL career with the Rangers, scoring 132 goals and setting up 122 others over 450 games. He has 11 goals this season.

The Lightning, with 34 wins and 73 points from 62 games, rank fourth in the Eastern Conference while the Rangers, with 33 wins and 69 points from 62 games, share seventh in the East, although four rivals are within two points in pursuit of the eight available playoff spots.

Tampa Bay also announced the return of Stamkos, who was injured in a 3-0 loss at Boston last November 11.

"I can't believe it has been four months already. I'm ready to get back. I've put in the work. Hopefully it pays off," Stamkos said.

Golf: Ishikawa among PGA hopefuls at Puerto Rico Open



RIO GRANDE (AFP) - Japan's Ryo Ishikawa hopes this week's return to the scene of one of his brightest moments on the US PGA Tour will help revive his season.

Ishikawa, who has missed the cut in his past three starts, will be among the featured players at the \$3.5 million Puerto Rico Open.

While most of the world's top players will play at the World Golf Championships event at Miami, a mix of young talent and six major winners will compete for the

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Baseball: Orioles sign southpaw Santana after long layoff

SARASOTA (AFP) - Johan Santana, twice named his league's top pitcher, signed a deal with Major League Baseball's Baltimore Orioles on Tuesday as he bids to make a comeback after undergoing left-shoulder surgery.

Santana last pitched in Au-

gust 2012 for the New York Mets, the southpaw missing the 2013 campaign while recovering from surgery last April. He also missed the 2011 season with a similar injury.

Santana, who turns 35 later this month, won American League Cy Young Awards as top pitcher with Minnesota in 2004 and 2006. The Venezuelan is 139-78 with a 3.20 earned-run average in 360 major league appearances.

The Orioles signed a devel-

opmental-level contract with Santana but offered an invitation to their pre-season training camp to allow him a chance to make the top squad.

In 2012, Santana went 6-9 with a 4.85 earned-run average for the Mets and threw the first no-hitter in team history, taking 134 pitches in the effort.

Baltimore is examining several left-handed pitchers with an eye to relief roles in their bullpen rather than a place in the starting rotation.

NBA: Nets sign pioneer Collins to another 10-day deal



NEW YORK (AFP) - Jason Collins, the first openly gay player in the NBA, has signed a second 10-day contract with the Brooklyn Nets, team general manager Billy King announced Wednesday. Collins scored three points and grabbed five rebounds in 36 minutes on the court as a reserve center over five games in his first 10-day deal. The 35-year-old American became the first openly gay player in any of the four major American men's team sports when he walked onto the court for the Nets on February 23 in a road game against the Los Angeles Lakers. Collins received a standing ovation at his first home game for the Nets on Monday, a 96-80 victory over Chicago. In his 13th NBA season, Collins has averaged 3.6 points and 3.7 rebounds over 718 NBA appearances. Collins, who revealed his homosexuality in a Sports Illustrated cover story nearly 10 months ago, helped the Nets reach the NBA Finals twice when the team was based in nearby New Jersey.

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Olympics: Doctors confirm injured Russian skier paralysed

MOSCOW (AFP) - A Russian freestyle skier who was hospitalised after a serious accident at the Sochi Winter Olympic Games is permanently paralysed, Russia's Freestyle Federation said Wednesday, citing her doctors.

Maria Komissarova, 23, is in a German clinic after suffering a fractured spine in a crash in training for the ski cross event at Sochi 2014, by far the worst accident of the Winter Games.

"Due to the severity of the injury, the functions of the spinal canal are not regenerating," the federation cited specialists at the German clinic as saying.

Komissarova is due to spend another 10 weeks in the German clinic learning to adapt to her condition and will then undergo a long period of treatment and rehabilitation, the federation said.

Komissarova herself wrote on Instagram late last month: "I do not feel my body lower than my belly button... But I am strong and I know that some day I will definitely be on my feet again."

While still hospitalised in Russia, Komissarova had received a personal visit from President Vladimir Putin at her bedside.

Ski-cross is one of the most frenetic and risky events of the Games, where four skiers race together down a slope filled with jumps, obstacles and banked corners.

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Pistorius trial - key points from day three

PRETORIA (AFP) - Oscar Pistorius fired a gun in a restaurant, grazing a friend's foot, and then asked someone else to take the blame, the third day of the South African athlete's murder trial heard Wednesday.

Professional boxer Kevin Lerena testified that Pistorius fired a bullet under a table at an upmarket Johannesburg restaurant in January 2013, the month before he shot dead his girlfriend Reeva Steenkamp on Valentine's Day.

"A shot went off in the restaurant, then there was just

complete silence," Lerena, 21, the state's fourth witness told the South African High Court in Pretoria.

"I looked down, and just where my foot was stationary, there was a hole in the floor," said Lerena, testifying about one of three other gun-related charges against Pistorius.

"I had a little graze on my toe. I wasn't hurt or injured," he said, but added that "there was blood."

The Paralympian apologised profusely, then asked another friend, the owner of the gun, to

take the blame.

"Please, I don't want any attention around me. Just say it was you," he pleaded, according to Lerena.

Pistorius has denied intentionally killing Steenkamp and has pleaded not guilty to the other charges, including one of firing a gun through a moving car's sunroof and to illegal possession of ammunition.

The state is expected to use these incidents to illustrate past reckless behaviour in their argument to prove the runner planned to kill his girlfriend.

On the third day of trial, his defence also sought to prove that a married couple who heard screams on the night of Reeva Steenkamp's death colluded in their testimony, hoping to discredit key witnesses.

Pistorius's lawyer Barry Roux attempted to show written statements and testimony from Charl Johnson and Michelle Burger contained "remarkable coincidences" that could not be accidental.

Earlier, in vivid testimony that cast doubt on Pistorius' claims of a "tragic accident,"

the pair told the court they heard a screams then gunshots on Valentine's Day 2013 at Pistorius's home.

The couple's account would undermine Pistorius's claim that he shot the 29-year-old model and law graduate through a locked toilet door after mistaking her for an intruder.

As the trial resumed on Wednesday, Roux sought to put the defence back on the front foot, submitting Johnson to pointed cross-examination a day after his wife was reduced to tears in the witness box.